

## Heroin

Street terms for heroin: smack, thunder, hell dust, big H, nose drops<sup>1</sup>

What does heroin look like?

- Pure heroin is a white powder with a bitter taste.
- Most illicit heroin varies in color from white to dark brown.
- "Black tar" heroin is sticky like roofing tar or hard like coal, and its color may vary from dark brown to black.

How is heroin used?

- Injecting
- Smoking
- Snorting

Who uses heroin?

- In the United States in 1999 there were 104,000 new heroin users.
- In 2000, approximately 1.2% of the population reported heroin use at least once in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

How does heroin get to the United States?

- The U.S. heroin market is supplied entirely from foreign sources of opium.
- Production occurs in South America, Mexico, Southeast Asia, and Southwest Asia.<sup>3</sup>

How much does heroin cost?

- Nationwide, in 2000, South American heroin ranged from \$50,000 to \$200,000 per kilogram. Southeast and Southwest Asian heroin ranged in price from \$40,000 to \$190,000 per kilogram. Wholesale-level prices for Mexican heroin were the lowest of any type, ranging from \$13,200 to \$175,000 per kilogram. The wide range in kilogram prices reflects variables such as buyer/seller relationships, quantities purchased, purchase frequencies, purity, and transportation costs.<sup>4</sup>

What are some consequences of heroin use?

- One of the most significant effects of heroin use is addiction. Once tolerance happens, higher doses become necessary to achieve the desired effect, and physical dependence develops.<sup>5</sup>
- Chronic use may cause collapsed veins, infection of heart lining and valves, abscesses, liver disease, pulmonary complications, and various types of pneumonia.<sup>6</sup>
- May cause depression of central nervous system, cloudy mental functioning, and slowed breathing to the point of respiratory failure.<sup>7</sup>

- Heroin overdose may cause slow and shallow breathing, convulsions, coma, and possibly death.<sup>8</sup>
- Users put themselves at risk for contracting HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other viruses.<sup>9</sup>

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1 Office of National Drug Control Policy, Street Terms: Drugs and the Drug Trade.

2 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Summary of Findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, September 2001.

3 Drug Enforcement Administration, Drug Trafficking in the United States, September 2001.

4 Ibid.

5 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Infobox: Heroin, 2000.

6 Ibid.

7 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Research Report: Heroin Abuse and Addiction, 1999.

8 Drug Enforcement Administration, Drug Descriptions: Heroin.

9 Office of National Drug Control Policy, Drug Facts: Heroin.